1: Gillin E-5 (1932-33) 1936 SR9 Carib SR9

INTRODUCTION

THE original scope of the present study was to gather and interpret data on the social organization and the physical anthropology of the Barama River Caribs of British Guiana. The late Dr. Walter E. Roth, whose death in March, 1933, ended a long and distinguished career as an ethnological investigator both in Australia and in British Guiana, had devoted a period of more than thirty years to a study of the Guiana Indians. Dr. Roth's interests lay most strongly within the fields of material culture. It was felt that his compendious publications (see bibliography) on these aspects of Guiana Indian life left little to be done in that field with the time which could be devoted to the present research. Dr. Roth combined an exhaustive sifting of the literature with the results of his own extensive inquiries carried on in various parts of the colony. He also made valuable contributions to our knowledge of the religion and folklore of the various tribes of the Guianas.

Since the sixteenth century a series of explorers, missionaries, and occasional scientists have published interesting data on the Indians of the Guianas and associated tribes. The problem of the Harvard expedition therefore was twofold: first, to select a tribe which had hitherto been neglected; second, to choose those aspects of primitive life which, on the basis of an examination of the earlier literature, had received scant attention in the past. It was apparent that two tribes which had been most neglected were the Waiwais living at the head of the Essequibo River, and the Caribs of the Barama River in the Northwest District. For financial reasons the latter were chosen.

Only two small anthropometric series had hitherto been collected in the colony. Also it became apparent that there was in existence no sociological analysis of a primitive culture in this area. Physical anthropology and sociology were consequently chosen as the logical fields for research. It was not considered advisable, however, to limit activities strictly to these two fields, to shut them off arbitrarily from other aspects of the native life. It will be seen in the following pages, therefore, that an attempt has been made to present the whole culture, but that detailed description and

121 analysis have been in the main reserved for those features most
114 intimately connected with the social organization.

124 Cultural data were acquired in interviews conducted by the "free association" method, with no preconceived organization imposed upon informants. Conversation was struck up with Indians wherever they were met, on the river in their canoes, around the camp fire at night, in their houses during drinking sprees, anywhere and everywhere. In these informal chats, a note-book was seldom used, but the interviewer retired directly following the conversation and made notes. Informants were frequently recalled to supplement information after the notes had been set down. In this way, without ostensibly directing the discussion or suggesting attitudes or facts, I was able to acquire a familiarity with usages and concepts which could be checked against each other independently. Having thus "blocked out" a certain department of culture, I then proceeded to a series of formal interviews with sober informants to clear up obscurities and further to check accuracy. In the text I have indicated those points concerning which there was important difference of opinion or on which I was able to obtain only unchecked information. Of the information which I have set down, therefore, I am either reasonably certain or have indicated otherwise.

121 It is to be regretted that documentary and archeological data
114 concerning the Barama Caribs do not extend back more than approximately a century, so that it is not possible to view the present culture in the light of a long historic background. However, such historical material as is available for this tribe is presented wherever it is relevant to a more complete understanding of the present culture. On the other hand, this study makes no pretense to elaborate historical reconstruction. The purpose of the ethnological portion of this paper is to present Carib culture as it was in the years 1932–1933 and to attempt to understand the fundamental workings of that culture. The author hopes at some future date to complete a thoroughgoing ethnographic comparison of the culture of the Barama Caribs with those reported from other groups in the area.

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123 The investigator spent a total of seven months in the colony.

2: Adams E-4,5 (1970-1971) 1973 SR9 Carib SR9
(1932-1971) Barama River

I

INTRODUCTION

114 The Carib Amerindians of the Guyanas have been variously studied. The older reports by Roth (1918, 1924) emphasize material culture and mythology. The data available in the Handbook of South American Indians (Rouse 1948:547-565) are generalized and pertain to the cultural patterns of the Island Carib. Taylor (1938, 1946, 1953) and Banks (1956) have contributed to the contemporary ethnography of the Island Carib. As a precedent in Carib studies in the Guyanas, Gillin presents an ethnographic survey of a specific group, the Barama River Caribs (1936). More recent research adds a problem orientation to this specific focus. Schwerin (1966) and Kloos (1971) consider the manner in which national interests have affected local Carib groups. Schwerin reports on Carib villages affected by the oil and steel industries in Venezuela; Kloos, on Carib villages affected by a regional market for fish in Surinam.

121 114 [10] This study is formulated in reference to these previous ones. The concern here is also a specific group, the Caribs of the Upper Barama River in the North West District of Guyana. These are essentially the same Caribs studied by Gillin forty years ago. The general problem addressed is also similar to the previous ones. The [179] local impact of regional influences is considered. However, Schwerin and Kloos present synchronic analyses. As Gillin did not disguise

121 informants or locations, another dimension is added here. Individ-
* 114 uals can be identified and the establishment of trans-generational
124 continuity is possible.

121 Two areas of theoretical concern particularly lend themselves to
* 177 investigation under the fortuitous circumstances of being able to
[161] trace changes occurring over time among a specific group. The first
is cultural change: the second, human population control mechanisms.

175 In regard to cultural change, until forty years ago the Caribs
*177 of the Upper Barama River were adapting to the equatorial rain
182 forest with essentially a lithic technology. They combined hunting,
[22] fishing, and collecting with a semi-nomadic form of horticulture.
[241] Currently, the majority of these Caribs are settled at a community
* 177 known as Baramita Air Strip. They engage in wage employment, make
[465] use of regional markets for local products, participate in agricul-
[438] tural development programs, and benefit from national medical
[242] programs. From a position of relative isolation in the rain forest,
[657] this group has been increasingly encapsulated in the national
[161] political economy. Attending this development has been changes in
their population size and composition as well as internal organiza-
tion. These changes are a major focus of the present study.

121 In pursuing the analysis of these changes, cultural materialism
is relied upon as the most economical mode of explanation. Among
others, Harris (1968) has proposed that techno-environmental
determinants can serve in a comparative approach to cultural
adaptation. One example of this approach is Murphy and Steward's
comparison of the Mundurucu of Brazil and the Northeastern

2: Adams E-4,5 (1970-1971) 1973 SR9 Carib SR9
(1932-1971) Barama River

Algonkians of Canada (1956). The Schwerin report (1966) and particularly Kloos' (1971) analysis also employ a frame of reference that gives emphasis to techno-environmental factors that are generative of cultural adaptation and change.

Accordingly, it is proposed that the organizational strategies of human populations conform to determinants of the exploitative technologies and the resources available. This hypothesis is used to inquire into cultural change among the Caribs of the Upper Barama River. The Carib population identified as the unit for study is a small group, currently numbering about 550. They alone inhabit the Upper Barama River drainage basin. The boundaries of the local population are identified operationally by the cultural practices which maintain a shared set of material exchanges (Rappaport 1969: 184). However, these cultural practices have changed as the materials or resources available to be exchanged have been altered. Over time, external resources have been added to those locally available. What has been maintained is the common participation of this population in these exchanges. Changes affecting the resources available to the Upper Barama River Caribs will be more fully explored in Chapter II.

A second problem with which this study is concerned has to do with certain aspects of human population ecology. Alland (1967) proposes that population adaptation is situationally specific. Accordingly, human adaptation measured by population size can be evaluated in two instances: (1) when two competitive populations occupy the same environment; and (2) when one population occupies

121 population density. For the most part, these ecological studies
161 consider population size a variable in a closed system. Thus, low
[182] density is attained by behavioral patterns which regulate population size relative to local resources. Cultural practices which control conception or carry a high mortality hazard for an age segment of the population intervene to limit the population size below the limits of the available resources. In the case of the Upper Barama River Caribs, changes in population size will be investigated in relation to a succession of external resources and can be easily identified.

114 Data for this study were collected from several sources.
127 Gillin's report on the same group, The Barama River Caribs of British Guiana (1936) has already been mentioned. In addition, archival data of a general nature and census reports were collected in Georgetown. Finally, field work was conducted on the population in question over a nine-month period in 1970-71.

121 In sum, this inquiry is a case study of cultural change and
* 177 attendant shifts in aspects of the human population ecology. The
161 focus is directed to adaptations made by the Upper Barama River
[182] Carib population with their entrance into a regional political economy. The nexus between the nature and extent of external resources available in the Upper Barama River drainage basin and changes in the organization and size of the local Carib population will be explored in the following chapters.

2: Adams E-4,5 (1970-1971) 1973 SR9 Carib SR9
(1932-1971) Barama River

II

HISTORY OF REGIONAL CONTACTS AND SUBSISTENCE RESOURCES

131 The headwaters of the Barama River are on the eastern slope of
133 the low divide which marks the Venezuelan frontier. The Barama River, fed by many tributaries, meanders through the rain forest in a generally easterly direction for about 100 miles until it flows into the Waini River. The Great Falls at Towakaima divides the Barama River drainage basin into an upper and a lower section. This report concerns the upper section. Figure 1 is a map of the Barama River in relation to the rest of Guyana. Figure 2 is a more detailed map of the Barama River area.

132 The physical environment of the Upper Barama area remains as
[114] Gillin describes it (1936:xii-xiii). Rainfall fluctuates from year to year, usually accumulating 110 to 120 inches annually (King 1968:
137 148). The drainage basin of the Upper Barama River supports a forest
[133] vegetation with a highest canopy of about 100 feet. The flora is mixed, and species occur in all possible combinations. The tall (35M) mora tree is perhaps the most impressive species (King 1968:22).
132 There is very little terrain that is not inundated by seasonal rain.
133 Bishop reports no high ground suitable for an air strip between Towakaima and the mouth of the Baramita tributary (1941:6).

133 From Baramita mouth to Towakaima, the basin is a wide, flat plain with a gentle gradient (Bishop 1941:8). The Baramita flows

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 9 1

traced over a forty year period during which external resources have been added to those locall- available. Fortunately, the external resources under consideration, employment and exchange opportunities and medical care and other government services, have been introduced with sufficient separation in time so that their specific relationships with population changes can be investigated.[11]

In 1932-33, Gillin observed that the Upper Barama River Caribs were relatively unaffected by external influences (1936:111). Their population size reflected the local emphasis of their adaptation. As already mentioned, it can be estimated that there were about 200 Caribs in the Upper Barama River area during 1932-33. At this time the ratio of adults to children was about one to one (1936:204). For adult classification, Gillin required males to be over twenty-one and females over eighteen (1936:205).

For the Sawari settlement in the Upper Barama River area, Gillin recorded forty-seven individuals (1936:110). Of this group, twenty-six are adults and twenty-one are children. This includes thirteen men and seven boys, fourteen women and thirteen girls. In this instance, puberty distinguishes adult from child. For some individuals, Gillin estimates their age as an aspect of general description, but he does not do this for all individuals. Consequently, little can be said regarding a more accurate age structure for this early time period.

Regarding behavioral patterns that regulate population size, Gillin reports no restraints on the sexual activity of married partners except for an abstinence of about a month after the birth of

175 a population of approximately 200 people. This provided a density of
162 approximately one person per five square miles along the Upper Barama
[161] River corridor.

*177 Over time, with the introduction of external resources, this
162 relationship has been changed. The niche of the Upper Barama Caribs
was first extended by exchange and employment opportunities. Peberty's
observations (1948) on this population were made during the first ex-
[161] tensive involvement in employment. However, the data presented take
the form of estimates rather than actual figures.

114 Peberty visited the Upper Barama River area sometime between
161 December 1945 and February 1946 for the purpose of making suggestions
181 for Amerindian development. He reports that "The Upper Barama River
Caribs are the most impoverished and traumatic aboriginal group that
I have encountered throughout the length and breadth of British
Guiana" (1948:20). In part, he attributes this condition to the loss
of Carib crafts as a consequence of opportunities with the miners.
[165] Peberty reports further an unspecified but "relatively high" infant
mortality (1948:15). However, he provides no explanation. Also, he
suggests that a reputed decline in the population is related to the
"morbid conditions of these contemporary Carib groups" (1948:20). He
estimates about 474 Caribs for the Upper Barama River area and the
114 Barima tributaries (1948:15). Little can be said regarding population
161 increase or decrease at this time from his observations. However,
there is one indication that the population size reported by Gillin
was little changed. In 1953, eighty-eight adults were registered to
[666] vote in the Upper Barama River area.

of children occurs throughout the segments of this population. The Air Strip population of 333 has 164 or 49.0 percent under ten. The remaining population of 218 in the satellite settlements includes 117 under ten. This is 53.7 percent of this portion of the population. As is apparent, the increase in population size and the change in reproductive pattern responsible for it have occurred commonly among the Upper Barama River Carib population.

With regard to the current reproductive pattern, a married state continues to be common for all adults of reproductive age. Also, there are no restrictions on the sexual activity of married couples, and the practice of couvade which rendered a father inactive in all ways for a few weeks after the birth of his child is being abandoned. Extramarital sexual encounters are common among all ages. Nevertheless, young women become pregnant for the first time usually between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. After this, they have about twenty-five reproductive years during which a woman tends to give birth to a child every twenty to thirty months.[12] According to this pattern, every fertile woman has the potential to reproduce about twelve to thirteen children.[13] The women in monogamous as well as polygynous unions tend to realize this potential. Solien de González (1966) has suggested that long term, intensive lactation may supress ovulation. Although the interplay of behavioral and physiological factors may be complex, the reproductive results in this case are clear.

In the general ratio of women to children in the total population, there are eighty-two women between the ages of twenty and forty-four,

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175 162 114 [173] [1]It is improbable that the exact history of the current Upper Barama River Carib population can be established. Schomburgk, during his surveying of the North West District in the 1840's, found Akawai as well as Carib settlements on the Barama River (1848:359-363). Gillin, of course, found only Carib settlements in 1932-33 and suggests that the Caribs usurped the Akawai position in the area. Gillin records a local tradition that the first Carib ancestors migrated from around the head of the Corentyne River to the Barama River and concludes that the ancestors of the Carib population had been in the area only for about 200 years (1936:113).

162 166 [173] During the 1970-71 field work, it was discovered that several male Carib ancestors with significant numbers of offspring in the current population had migrated into the Upper Barama River area from the Pomeroon River area. Some had done this to escape the widespread influenza epidemic after World War I. Also, at least some Caribs currently maintain that according to tradition, the first ancestors to populate the Upper Barama River area came either from Venezuela or the Cuyuni River area. In any case, the question of these origins does not pertain to the analysis being developed.

000 [551] [2]Carib nicknames remain in use (Gillin 1936:77-78). Individuals guard the privacy of these names to different degrees. Western names are also used. In addition to a chosen first name, the father's first name is usually taken as a last name. Thus Manuel Jacob's son is called Francis Manuel.

[103] [3]In addition to nine obvious Carib settlements in the Upper Barama River area, Gillin includes the location of "John's Settlement" and "Old World" with no indication of their nature (1936:2). Their names highly suggest mining camps of some sort.

Also, Gillin reports the abandonment of two settlements, Massewah (same as Maswakai) and Korotoko (1936:125,135), which were subsequently reinhabited. In consideration of all of these factors, the estimated figure of ten inhabited settlements appears to be appropriate.

[103] [4]The Upper Barama River Caribs explain that the Carib name for this settlement is Sevalipialu and that the abbreviation Sawari is used with non-Carib people. The shorter name, consistent with Gillin's usage, is maintained here.

[5]Gillin later revises this estimated range to seven to seventy individuals (1936:98), but the first more conservative estimate of settlement size appears to be more appropriate for the Carib settlements in the Upper Barama River area.

[36] [103] [197] [6]It must be pointed out that the Carib people recognize a distinction between the group of settlements in the upper section and the lower section of the Upper Barama River. They refer to the former as Barama Top Side and the latter as Barama Bottom Side and claim

household context is reflected in the kinship system.

Kinship

Persistence and change in elements of the kinship system are in keeping with changes in household composition and relationships among households. The kinship system in use during Gillin's field work is reported in Figures 14 and 15. Figures 16 and 17 present the kinship system in use during 1970-71. Table 13 compiles the Carib terms used by males; Table 14, those used by females.

Basically, this is a cognatic system with Iroquoian features. Categories of individuals in three middle generations, ego's and the immediate ascending and descending generations are identified. Aspects of bifurcate merging are evident in all three of these generations. The terminology extends one more generation in each direction. However, all individuals in the categories grandmother, grandfather, and grandchild are socially identical. There is no further lineal extensions. Although Gillin entertains the possibility (1936:90-98), there is no premise for sib or clan organization. Rather, this is a particularly egocentric kinship system. Its major purpose appears to be the categorization of people for each individual. A person's sex and age affect the manner in which related individuals are designated, and the changes in the system of categorization reflect shifts in the patterns of interaction among categories of people.

The kinship system as reported by Gillin is one particularly suited to operating among a relatively small, endogamous population

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[1]Gillin does not report the exact relationship between Miller and John Cook's wife.

[273] [2]Cassiri is fermented from cassava.* Gillin reports two recipes (1936:61). Currently, only one is commonly used. Cassava meal is baked into dark brown cakes. Water with grated red potato for color is placed in the kanu - a hollow cedar log with carved handles at each end. The women with teeth then crumble the cakes with their hands into a mash in the kanu. All the while they chew mouthfuls of this mash and return it to the kanu. The contents of the kanu are then allowed to set for about three days before the drink is ripe. Singing and dancing and general conviviality take place during a cassiri spree until the supply of cassiri is exhausted. Attendance is by invitation, but strangers are usually welcomed.

[3]This contrasts to the nature of the work itself such as rubber collecting among the Mundurucu and fur trading among the Algonkian which resulted in nuclear family organization (Murphy and Steward 1956). Rubber trees and fur-bearing animals tend to occur in defined territories best exploited by single, mobile nuclear families.

[4]During the field work conducted in 1970-71, there occurred considerable innovation and experimentation with house types at the Air Strip and in the satellite settlements. In some cases, a wall was added on one or more sides of the traditional house structure, which is posts supporting a thatched roof. These walls were made of slats, boards, logs, woven mats or a variety of these materials. Also, some houses were built on tall poles which allowed a living floor to be constructed as much as one story above ground.

[5]Carib crafts have diminished in variety and skill since trade goods have been available. This is markedly apparent with regard to pottery. There are few potters and few pots. Commercial cookware of aluminum or enamel is used at the Air Strip and the satellite settlements for cooking and storage purposes.

[323] The diversity of clay pots reported by Gillin (1936:48-49) has been reduced to three types. A combination of shape and size elements distinguish the tuma etna, tukuvali, and tuluwa. The tuma etna or sauce pot is any small, free standing pot. These are between six and ten inches in dimension and include a variety of shapes. The tukuvali and tuluwa are not free standing. Rather, their base is small and somewhat pointed making it necessary for these pots to be supported by being partially sunk in the ground. They may be rimmed or rimless. The tuluwa has a broad mouth and is used for boiling sweet cassiri. The tukuvali has a constricted mouth and is primarily for storage. Sizes vary considerably. The largest are about three feet by three feet and the smallest are about eight inches in all dimensions.

• [114] [241] [6]In his examination of the diagnostic features of slash-and-burn

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[114] [241] cultivation, Conklin (1954:142) has also pointed out that the efficiency can only be measured by yield per unit of labor rather than per unit of area which is possible with some other types of agrarian systems.

[658] [671] [7]The government school at Baramita Air Strip maintains an enrollment of about 100 of which about fifty students are in daily attendance.

[114] [8]Lave's (1966) and Riviere's (1966) arguments concerning the implications of marriage with sister's daughter in the structural integrity of a kinship system do not appear to apply in this case.

[9]From among the three terms for mother's brother, yaoko is exclusively used.

[10]Terminology from the male speaking system has been adopted for the new designation of father's sister's son's children.

[601] [11]Carib kinship terms still reflect the acknowledgement of deference among immediate in-laws. Translated literally, a man calls his father-in-law, "my child's grandfather." He calls his mother-in-law, "my child's grandmother." Likewise, both men and women call their son-in-law, "my grandchild's father"; a daughter-in-law, "my grandchild's mother." As yet, no specific terms exist with which a woman designates a mother-in-law or father-in-law. Previously, she was not likely to meet these individuals.

P /55 cont./
842 trip the next day, they do maintain several precautions such
P as putting on moriche sandals, abstaining from certain foods and from certain acts, nor do they dare to raise their voices.

[114] 118. The patriarch of modern ethnology, Father W. Schmidt, director of the Vatican Ethnological Museum, sees three or four degrees of this custom of the couvade: a) abstinence from certain foods; b) abstention from certain acts; c) absolute rest up to staying in bed; d) an imitation by the man of the pains of childbirth in women.

The Pemón Indians (the men) at the present time only practice the couvade in the first two degrees. It would seem that formerly they also practiced the third degree, but only as a consequence of the first two, since if the Indian wishes to maintain a rigorous diet and in addition must abstain from most operations, the most logical and natural thing is that he should lie down in his hammock and rest, or, as they themselves say in their language, adopt the horizontal position, (esuraika), which is the least tiring one.

From this it is not necessary to infer that the diet should be fasting, nor even less should we believe in bloody mortifications, when precisely what is trying to be avoided is all pain, all fatigue, and all unbalance which by repercussion might
C damage the tender infant. For this I judge most exaggerated
● 114 and even contradictory what Roberto Agramonte says about the
846 Caribes, documented in who knows what acts: "Among the Caribes, the man /56/ fasted for six months and became as thin as a skeleton; the fast consisted of eating cassava: at the end of 40 days of fasting (so exact?) the members of the family covered him with deep scratches until he bled and to martyrize him even more they washed his wounds with water and red pepper: then he returned to his hammock, completely sick and in pain, and continued the fasting until the seventh month,
P when he could now eat meat and fish." Let us note once more
101 that the Pemón, with whom we are dealing, are clearly Caribes, and among the most primitive of them.